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REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS ON ITS IN-SESSIONAL MEETING HELD DURING THE THIRTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL, 4-29 MAY 1992

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Addendum

CHAPTER VIII. MATTERS REFERRED TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE BY THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

The Programme Approach

1. The Assistant Administrator introduced the report of the Administrator on The Programme Approach (DP/1992/46), which describes the steps taken by UNDP to follow up the recommendations of General Assembly resolution 44/211 with reference to the need to place UNDP assistance in the context of national programme frameworks. He referred to the letter of guidance of 24 January transmitting to Resident Representatives and specialized agencies the Consolidated Report on the Santiago and Geneva Workshops on the Programme Approach, and also to the meeting with United Nations agencies on 8 May 1992, both of which had contributed to refining the issues and facilitating a common understanding of a concept that was gaining increasing acceptance as the main programming tool for the years ahead. He indicated that the next stage would be the preparation of guidelines, together with experimentation and sharing of experience.

2. Many delegations gave their views on document DP/1992/46. While there was general endorsement of the programme approach as both a concept and a tool, the need to understand its operational implications was expressed. It was recognized that the programme approach involved the formulation of

national programmes that identified components for which support could subsequently be given by donors, including UNDP, according to their respective comparative advantages. Delegations were also informed that a major observation of United Nations agencies was that the concept should be broadened to include regional, interregional and global programmes, and, where possible, to link these to national programmes.

3. It was noted that considerable experimentation was taking place in many countries, and delegations expressed interest in learning the results. A subsequent informal consultation on the programme approach provided delegations with an opportunity to learn about the experience in the Gambia with the formulation of the Economic Management Capacity-Building Programme (EMCBP).

4. Delegations identified a number of areas where clarification or follow-up was required, as, for instance:

(a) The need for performance indicators at the programme level to facilitate monitoring and evaluation;

(b) The need to issue guidelines as early as possible so as to provide field offices, agencies and governments with an operational tool for the preparation of national programmes and the formulation of appropriate UNDP and other support. At the same time, such guidelines would save effort and potential frustration and avoid the proliferation of many different formats.

Several delegations proposed that such guidelines should be communicated to the Standing Committee for information and review prior to finalization. One delegation mentioned that this should not be seen as micro-management by the Committee, but rather as an opportunity for mutual exchange of views in the continuing context of dialogue and partnership between UNDP and donors. It would also enable UNDP to share its experience with bilateral programmes;

(c) The need to delegate approval authority on the basis of policy and substantive criteria rather than on a financial limit. Thus, headquarters should only be involved at the programme level, by approving assistance to programmes identified in the country programme. One delegation suggested that if a financial limit existed it could be fixed at $5 million, or one fifth of the IPF. The delegation cited the experience of another delegation in that although programmes might have been approved at the headquarters level individual projects still had to be approved by headquarters if they exceeded the $700,000 limit. Under this scenario, Resident Representatives and governments would be responsible for the design and implementation of programmes and UNDP support, and for ensuring that the desired impact was made. Headquarters would provide the appropriate policy guidance and endorsement, and would assume a greater backstopping and monitoring function;

(d) The need to proceed with an extensive trial period, prior to generalized use of the programme approach, thus giving an opportunity to test its relative costs and benefits and to streamline approval procedures;

(e) The need to establish programme management arrangements, including coordination mechanisms, with both national and donor organizations involved in implementation;

(f) The need to clarify and test the concept, the appropriateness, and the operational modalities of using output budgets as a tool for choice of outputs and activities, and/or for disbursement of funds on the basis of outputs produced;

(g) The need to take into account the risks of providing support to programmes, and thereby assessing in advance the realistic chances of attaining programme and project objectives;

(h) The need to share examples of programme approaches applied in different countries, for instance India (leather and jute programmes), Malawi, Bolivia, Ghana (fisheries), China (machine tools) etc., as well as sectoral programmes (e.g. education). A compilation and analysis of such experiences could be a useful input into the work of the Standing Committee;

(i) The need to provide an appropriate conceptual framework for those countries in which a programme approach may not be feasible, or desired by the Government, for instance, those with very limited IPF resources;

(j) The need to review the continuing validity of the tripartite relationship, in the context of increasing trends towards national execution, and diversity of sources of implementing agents. These could be national and/or international agencies, including those in the United Nations system;

(k) The need to proceed with the approval of the country programmes during the pilot phase;

(l) The need to make a progress report to the Governing Council at its fortieth session.

5. The Standing Committee took note of the above observations. In order to provide the appropriate policy guidelines for the continuing work on the programme approach, a draft decision on the programme approach was submitted by delegations from eight countries.

6. After further discussion, the Standing Committee recommended that the Governing Council approve the draft decision on the programme approach, contained in document DP/1992/L.18.